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Prehistoric Iowa

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PREHISTORIC IOWA.

Prof. Samuel Calvin, State Geologist of Iowa, in December, 1891, delivered a very interesting lecture before the State Historical Society on Prehistoric Iowa, which has but recently been published. The following extracts show what Iowa was according to geological teachings in the most remote ages of its existence:

"These records, untampered with and unimpeachable, declare that for uncounted years Iowa, together with the whole great Valley of the Mississippi, lay beneath the level of the sea, and so far as it was inhabited at all, marine forms of animals and plants were its only occupants. During these long years of submergence, the rocky strata of Iowa, as well as of all of the adjacent States, were successively accumulated as soft sediments on the sea bottom. Omitting the small area of Sioux quartzite in Lyon county, the oldest strata in the State are the limestones and sandstones of northeastern Iowa. These contain the record of a period of duration altogether incomprehensible. Myriads of years, if not myriads of centuries, pass again, and in the meantime the light-colored limestones, so well represented at Anamosa, grow by imperceptible sedimentary accretions. Other ages of similar duration drag on slowly into the lengthening past, but bring us only to the point at which the limestones and shales represented in Johnson county are completed. About this time a small portion of Iowa in the northeast becomes dry land, but all the region south and west was still under the all-pervading sea. * * * Another of those ages, to human comprehension limitless, wends slowly by, and the agents of sedimentation build up in slow succession the great crinoidal beds at Marshalltown, Burlington and Keokuk, together with the coal measures and associated strata of central and southern Iowa. Still Iowa and the rest of the world are without human occupants. * * * Soon after the completion of the coal measures, the sea left our whole State as a part of the growing continent. * * * But after long ages the sea again took possession of at least the northwestern

part of the State and another geologic period goes by before the upward movement of the land, by which Iowa is at length permanently disenthralled from the dominion of the sea. Forests take possession of the surface. Animals related to the dog, wolf and panther, as well as to the deer, the camel, the ox and the horse, unite with lizards, birds, bats and monkeys to impart a modern aspect to the assemblage of animals that occupied this latitude. *The climate was that of southern Louisiana.* The conditions were not inconsistent with the possibility of man's existence, and yet the records show that man, at the beginning of this new period, was not only absent from Iowa, but was absent still in every quarter of the globe."

LEWIS AND CLARK.

It is well known that in the early part of this century, within a year after the acquisition of "Louisiana" by the United States, Captains Lewis and Clark conducted an expedition for purposes of exploration of this vast territory which extended from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean. Their route lay across an unbroken wilderness, through what is now Missouri, Iowa, Kansas; Nebraska; South and North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. No white man up to that time had crossed the Rocky Mountains north of the Spanish and south of the British possessions. The Missouri River had not been visited much above Bismarck, nor was the Columbia River known above tide-water. This vast field of exploration was fresh and new. The Indian tribes which have since so sadly melted away, were in their best days, in happy ignorance of the white man and the contaminating influences of that "civilization" which has nearly swept them from the face of the earth. The plants and animals over that vast area were almost entirely unknown to science. As a matter of fact; no explorers were ever so favored with "fresh fields and pastures new," and they were equally favored in results, for they made the long journey of over 7,000 miles "with scarcely a casualty."

After the return of the expedition Mr. Nicholas Biddle, of Philadelphia—the "Nick Biddle" who figured so largely in the

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